

INTRODUCTION

Detroit is the oldest center of civilization in the vast area of the Great Lakes and the Mississippi Valley. Mission stations, it is true, and sometimes fur trade posts were established earlier at other points in this region—at Chequamegon, Green Bay, Mackinac, Chicago, and possibly elsewhere, but at all of these places the torch of civilization was later extinguished, either temporarily or permanently. The missions at Chequamegon and Chicago were abandoned soon after their establishment, and save for the presence of a few fur traders, the modern settlement of these places dates from the nineteenth century. Mackinac, settled earlier than Detroit, still remains a center of civilization; but there have been several removals of the settlement as originally founded, and the present one on the island dates only from 1780, while the place has steadily dwindled in relative importance from the commercial center of a wide region to a mere summer resort.

Detroit, on the other hand, throughout two and a quarter centuries has steadily maintained that importance which strategic considerations conferred upon her at birth, and is today one of the chief cities of the continent, both in population and in commercial importance. Nor does the interest which attaches to the story of Detroit's history suffer by comparison with that of any other American city. Here was the mildest climate of Canada and here beside the noble river which conveys the waters of the upper lakes to Lake Erie, developed the fairest settlement of Canada outside the lower St. Lawrence Valley. Here for a full generation—from 1760 until 1796—was the principal seat of British authority in the West and the center whence, for almost two decades, emanated the war parties which harried the American frontier from Pennsylvania to Tennessee. By the terms of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, Great Britain conceded to the American nation the territory lying south and west of a